

Mairéad Byrne

IN & OUT



Smithereens Press

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IN & OUT

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I CAN GO OUT

I can go out. Put on my padded coat, big gloves, boots, red cap, zip up. I can unlock the door, hit the step, step out into the bright day. Pick my way across the flags, down past the office, through the gate, out into the street. I can wait at the crossing, cross, stand with the cluster at the stop, get on the bus when it comes, validate my card, find a seat. I can ring the red bell, get off, step onto Tongil-ro, disappear down into Exit 4 of Hongje Station. I can go through the turnstiles, clack with my heels down more steps to the platform, choose right or left, jump to the bugle announcing the train's approach, get on when the doors open, swing from the strap when there is no seat, take a seat when there is, give it up to a man with a cane in a way that looks like I do not give it up but get off. Watch. I can get off at my stop, and make my way up to the surface again. I can find the new street, walk to places I've never been, meet people I've never met, build a cat's cradle of talk over lunch of fish and chips (me) and mussels (him). I can reverse everything, go back down the hill, down the steps, through the tunnels, up onto Tongil-ro, onto the 7738, back down Yeonhui-ro, take the right turn, and get off at the Community Center. I can walk home. Put my hand through the gate if it's closed and draw back the bolt. Walk through the gardens, the closed door of the office, climb the steps, come to my front door, enter the code, close down the cover, hear the buzz, and get in.

I CAN STAY IN

But it's a beautiful day, you say, and I agree, regretting only that it is too short. Also when one stays in all day and one is then disturbed by a crinkling crunching sound which when one takes the blue ear plugs out of one's ears seems at first to be the sound of rain which makes one wish to dash out—to smoke yes—but also to stand (smoking) to watch and laud the warm falling rain which then turns out to be someone stuffing garbage into the various recycling and trash bins behind my study window. Still, no-one can change that fleeting feeling of delirium when you first thought it was rain! But how they keep stuffing and arranging and tamping the garbage down! Maybe it is a big rat or some Korean animal I know nothing about as yet. Or maybe it is rain.

CAN YOU STAY IN AND GO OUT?

This question is at the heart of writing.

The Internet allows us to stay in and go out. I can be intensely social when everyone is asleep. Frightened by a knock on the door, I can be quite bold, even using odd language, over vast distances of space though in close to no time. It would be easy for me to think that the only way I can go out is to stay in. But often how I go out when I stay in is kind of crooked and malformed. When I go out, I am twice as big as everyone else. I really am magnified and it is very hard not to get in my own way. When I stay in I become very small (very small brain, only a pin-point) but I am very much at one with the furniture and most of all with the limited air. When light dies I am sad. I have to work in electric light which I actually do during the day too because I do like to huddle and secure myself and hide. Sometimes I wrap myself up tight in a blanket in order to write. *Why bother* you may ask. The world has enough drivel and this is not exactly "Ode to the West Wind." If I could do something better I would. But this (writing) has always been very kind to me, like an uncle or aunt who wants to encourage any weak effort you make. This Uncle or Aunt brings me to the theatre, to galleries, to poetry readings, to airports, to committees, to conferences and festivals. Actually this Uncle or Aunt is very like my father, whom I knew long ago. He could stay in and go out. Of the two he probably liked going out best. He was very good at home too though. I think the concept of staying in to go out was not really open to him, except in the sense of having children who would walk like tentacles all over the city and world and right into the future. Or scrupulous *Letters to the Editor* itemising the cost of running a car, 1967-1973, or Irish phrases for the weather, particularly an extensive vocabulary for clouds and rain.

THE DAY AFTER I GO OUT I DON'T HAVE TO GO OUT

The day after I go out I don't have to go out. This is the new rule and only fair. Going out takes a lot out of me. That is why I go out at most only every fourth day. The other days I go out just in the neighbourhood for one hour, to the store, or somewhere I haven't been. When I go out for real it is to meet people. When I come home again I have to lie down to sleep. Sometimes because of food. Or wine. Food and wine. Food and drink. So much, too much. And so much talk. So much talk. So much talk. I have to sleep. I think it's too much to go out, even in the neighbourhood, after the kind of episode I have every fourth day. The Full Monty: near, far, bus, subway, walk, talk, eat, drink, dress up. Too much. The day after I go out I shouldn't have to go out. Or the day after that either.

MONITORING MY EMAIL

I was up early this morning monitoring my email. Way before dawn. When it was still dark I groped for my laptop so I could check my phone bill. Now why were there extra charges this month? I could have had two more hours sleep or thought about anything under the sun on the planet but this question nagged me. *What was happening with my phone bill????* Once that was resolved to my satisfaction (sorry, can't go into it now, gotta keep my eye on the ball in this poem), I thought I might as well get up and have my breakfast cup of very strong espresso, plus a triangle of almond bread-cake (I don't know the name of it as I am only now learning the Korean alphabet). Which is what I did, much to my satisfaction and enjoyment. Then I thought, I may as well see if I can write a poem. But before I do that, I'll read "What 16 Writers Think of Donald Trump" in the *New Yorker*. Well turns out the writers think a bit too much so I couldn't read it all, just kinda skimmed it to see what I could identify with, while all the while being just the slightest bit wary and watchful for centipedes especially as I am still bare-footed. I sleep with a wire mesh strainer over my face (secured with a belt), over which I drape (loosely) a blue scarf (that I can almost see through), I also wear a thick red wool cap. There may be the black red-headed venomous kind here. I didn't take a long look at the one I killed yesterday before the colors were merged too much for identification. Anyway, after all that, and checking my email a few dozen times (it's still yesterday's work day in the US!), also finding out more about Gaseong City, I settled down to combing through my most recent notebook. But then I interrupted myself to write this. This is a true story. Nothing in this poem is made up for the purposes of reflecting glory on myself.

IT'S NOT ESSENTIAL TO GET UP VERY EARLY IN THE MORNING TO WRITE IF FOR EXAMPLE YOU GO TO A COUNTRY VERY FAR AWAY FROM EVERYONE YOU KNOW WHICH HAS A LANGUAGE WHICH YOU DO NOT KNOW EITHER

Korea for example.

If you are a non-Korean speaker based on the East Coast of the United States usually but in Korea (South Korea) for professional reasons and you get up at 2pm in Korea, it will be midnight the day before on the East Coast and everyone you know will be asleep or close.¹ The next day's newspapers will not have come out, even online.² The day's work will be done. Nothing more is going to happen. You can safely read all of yesterday's emails knowing that conversations won't be added to and that there's no point even replying for at least eight hours because your messages will just hang there, unread and unrevisable. You can work all day knowing you won't be interrupted or that anything you might write has any chance of being read. Unless your correspondent is a raging insomniac. Okay, so getting up at 2pm is not ideal, in any time zone. That's just an example, for demonstration purposes. You should really get up at 7am. The best time to write poetry is the morning, even if it takes all morning and most of the afternoon to shoe-horn or fool your way into a poem. Now admittedly you have a big desire to check in for human contact in the morning. That, and breakfast, are the two things that get you up. So, in order to be pragmatic, let's

¹The scene of writing in our example is the first Wednesday in November 2016, Korean Standard Time, a date which curiously negates much of the argument of the poem.

² This detail is important as our parallel scene is between the first Sunday and the first Wednesday of November, 2016, Eastern Standard Time.

say—provided you are out of bed and dressed—you can check email when you get up, over breakfast, at say 7:15am. That's 5:15pm the day before in the US. You can read your email but DO NOT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES RESPOND. Let them finish. Let the last voice chip in. Let them put on their coats. Let them head out into the rain. Let them go home. It's not safe to write back until at least 2pm Korean Standard Time, i.e., midnight Eastern Standard Time, as explained. But why would you do that? As indicated, there's something ignominious about knowingly sending out a message which won't be read, even if only for eight or ten hours. It makes no sense. You have everything to gain from *not writing messages*. Time to think. Time to turn to *your own writing*. No way are you going to squander the prime cut of the new day on email, right. You have the whole day before you. Everyone you know is threading their way through the dark or already there. So you write for six hours. It's now 2pm Korea time, what do you do? You have soup and then, taking advantage of the fact that everyone you know is asleep, you do another day's work. That's what poetry requires. So this will take you to 10pm your time which is actually a good time to respond to email. It's 8am in the US so you come off as disciplined and modestly ahead, not show-offy and unlikeable. Thing is though, you've had your soju and you're probably tired after your two days' work so your messages may not be as clear-headed as you'd like. If you opt instead for writing emails on your break,³ say late afternoon or early evening, that's 3:30 or 4:00am US time, so you look like a fanatic. It's the witching hour. Plus you're invading your writing time. Egregiously. You could circumvent the soju factor by another route, i.e., writing

³ "Break" is a tiny bit of a misnomer. Breaks may be as simple as walking up and down in the room for a minute or two (bathroom breaks can be blended into worktime, i.e., thinking time). In the hypothetical case proposed, the "break" would be around 5:30 or 6pm, with dinner (honouring European tradition, some time between seven and nine), which may in fact obviate the need for *both* repasts given close proximity. "Breaks," in the intended sense, implies food + work, a good (and even necessary) match. Email + work does not operate in the same way. A middle ground might be food + email but it seems degenerate somehow. Also, write email on a break? *Ahem*.

emails *before* dinner but it's complicated. Dinner is at your desk,⁴ remember, unless it's at 10pm, which gives no time to actually prepare it (if you're writing emails), unless you have already ordered takeout (in which case you'd have to interact with a stranger) or have a great restaurant in the neighborhood (ditto only plural) or a servant or a wife or husband who will oblige (a much more permanent commitment). If earlier, i.e., during working hours, you replace slight drunkenness with hunger, you're still tired (as well as hungry), plus it's now 6am in the U.S. so you still look like a fanatic or, more damaging still, like a monk who rises to follow his vocation (to write poetry) but chooses to write emails instead. Not good. And if indeed you do this at your desk, having eaten and drunk dinner, your messages will suffer, in a way which may possibly be accommodated by poetry but not emails, most certainly. Maybe we should work backwards. The best time for your emails to arrive in the U.S. is 8am. This means you should write them at 10pm at night. But you can't be too tired and emotional. So maybe a later start, as first suggested, is indeed warranted. Your 10pm should be more like 5 or 6pm which means you should get up at noon say. Seems late but hold the thought. You get up at noon, it's 10pm in the US, no question of doing anything more than simply *reading* emails. Do your ablutions, have breakfast, crack the first day's work, which takes you to 6 or 7pm, which is a very good dinner time in Korea and is also 4 or 5am in the US (no emails!). After dinner you do another few hours, which brings you to 10pm when, though you may have had some soju, you have not in fact done two days' work but only one, and possibly a bit, so you shouldn't be totally wasted. Now write your emails. It will be 8am in the US. If by any chance a reply is ricocheted back you can respond, fine, or not, whatever helps you wind down, prepare your meals for next day etcetera, because you have to be asleep by 2am, or noon in America, in order to be up at noon again the following day. The fact remains though that in this model you're really only doing

⁴ The reader no doubt understands that our system requires meals to be eaten during work time, i.e., "at one's desk," as the saying goes (though I myself frequently write in bed).

one day's work and face it, in poetry that's not going to cut it.⁵ No. Let's return to the earlier option. To recap: 8am Eastern Standard Time⁶ is the best time for emails to arrive. That means 10pm same day Korean Standard Time. But you're tired and emotional. That's because you got up at 7am. If you get up instead at noon then 10pm is really 5pm. There is too that strange and pleasurable feeling when you wake up late because you went to sleep late that nothing can happen now in America because everyone is asleep and you have the whole day to write. But you lose your two days and to be honest even your one day with breakfast and lunch is short. You could extend it by building in a half day say after dinner when the whole question of email is put to bed. The downside would be that you'd be all riled up and overstimulated by bedtime (4am) and out of sync in two key time zones so I don't think I don't think I just don't think this solution works. Plus whatever about writing emails after somaek you'd now be writing poetry (I've reversed my views on this one). Might I make a suggestion? *You do what's best for poetry*. A cool and rational time to respond, an optimal time, is 8am Eastern Standard Time. That's established. Okay so you, being a little tired perhaps, having worked and dined and wine (figuratively speaking), may not be at your most sparkling. You've had your beer or soju but that was two hours previous so no panic. And consider the counterweights. You've done your day's work, actually two day's work. You're satisfied. The consummately sane aspect of 8am in the US trumps any rough edges your end. So write your emails at 10pm. Now you can go to bed happy, knowing the buggers have all day (night) to respond. Then you get up next day, check the outcome, and respond before you go to bed that night, which is again 8am next day to them. You come up

⁵ An odd advantage though, which should not be overlooked, is that by going to bed at 2am, i.e., 4pm the day before US Eastern Standard Time, you will be removed from the possibility of replying to late afternoon emails from the US. This detachment may give the impression of a certain judiciousness and counterintuitively professionalism (i.e., *I have a life*), which may boost your profile more than the craven shoot-from-the-hip immediate response (to which something a little pathetic clings).

⁶ And why is Eastern Standard Time even called Eastern Standard Time seeing it's in the West?

smelling of roses. PLUS this gives you ALL DAY, 8am to 10pm to do your thing, without the necessity of checking your mail because you know everyone's gone home or is asleep. You also look really on the ball. In my next bulletin I will explain the further benefits of moving to a foreign country, one of which is that although you technically could be vulnerable to emails and news and knocks on the door from Korea during your Korean day, this probably won't happen because very few people speak English, the only language you really understand. I will also explain how handling newspapers, including online, works (US newspapers, not Korean, for language reasons already addressed, and possibly the *Guardian*), propose a Pacific Standard Time adaptation for my model, and discuss complications for American immigrants, i.e., people who may live and work in the US normally but who are in fact emigrants from a time zone closer to Korea. Ireland, for example. You may feel the tug of that time zone, like a weak tide. I may provide a brief introduction to Hangeul, with emphasis on the brilliance of King Sejong. I will also address temporality and permanence. For example, how sustainable is living in Korea while working in America and what other implications are involved. Sooner or later contacts and connections, obligations may build up, and what do you then? But now we're getting into questions of place rather than time agus *sin dán eile mar a deirtear*.

ONE THING UNDERNEATH ANOTHER THING

Beneath the electric blue sky the wide and deep rolling dark grey clouds beneath and across which silver starlings flash like one cheeky intelligence, like impudence and glory, cherub defiance, and far beneath the thick lines of buildings angled or flat occupying a different layer, coming from the ground not the sky, and beneath them the signs *Gold Wanted*, tangles of wire or traffic lights and the crowns of people's heads, sheathed in knit caps or hoods or hair, supervising hunched shoulders, zipped chests, knees, and battered shoes as they step *one-two* to wherever the next place is.

COMMAND CENTRE BED

Finally I have found a way of life where staying in bed the bulk of the day is not only justified but benignly and well understood and forgiven. For a start it's dark until after 8am. Even at that time, a blanket of rain and mist may obscure any vista beyond a few feet producing a kind of grey darkness very similar to the real thing. Then there's the cold. Now it's not *cold cold* exactly but you have to understand that the living habitations are far from *warm warm*. They may be adequate. That means the storage heaters which have sucked in energy all night expel it weakly from breakfast to tea time, that is some time in the morning until some time in the late afternoon. You may feel like climbing aboard the storage heater and making impossible love to it with all your might but the way they are installed on the wall, like flat perpendicular plates, makes that impossible. You cannot get close to them. Plus there is absolutely no give or yield. So, another very good reason for staying the one place it is warm. Bed. Now there's no doubt you have to get to do a few necessary things, related to bathroom, kitchen, and even maybe putting in an appearance in front of a neighbouring human being every now and then. Even the bed itself can take more or less constant tending and arranging. The power cord may be too short to reach from the socket to the actual bed so you have to jerry-rig a half-way house on your luggage turned sideways. There is of course no chance of the phone charger cord reaching that far and as the phone is your only means of virtual communication with the outside world and is consequently firing on all cylinders at all times very regular recharging is a must. Another thing is, due to a shortage of blankets, you may have to go to elaborate lengths of folding and stacking and securing in order to maintain comfort in the fresh and piquant climactic conditions of the cottage. Every now and then there's slippage. You also have to curate the back of the neck and how to remain comfortably propped. A laptop on the belly hours on end is not necessarily the healthiest thing but there's little alternative, unless you twist your body or head into unnatural positions which usually also

requires the aid of at least one elbow which dramatically reduces your ability to type and moreover can be painful. It takes a lot of time to get organized, I won't lie, but once you do, you can lie, in a different sense, as long as you want, while working, and remaining in touch with the greater reaches of the world, in your own bed, with the wild Atlantic raging outside countered by stubborn and brazen argument from the relentless wind, undercut by the mild unease of the house.

FEEDING THE SHEEP

The sheep crowd around one trough as the feed is poured in. Then they run to the other trough when the feed is poured in there, leaving the first trough full of feed but empty of sheep. After the farmer goes, they run back and forth like beads. There are seventeen sheep. When there are eight sheep at one trough and eight at the other, it's very hard for the seventeenth sheep to know where to go. It swivels its head from one possibility to the other. *Possibility* is a better word to describe sheep than *sheep*. They have big barrel bodies stuffed with wool that I can imagine many a cold Irishwoman or man eyeing and thinking *Now how can I get me some of that?* Their big woolly bodies are the *possy* part of *possibility*. They have slender delicate legs like stiff little dancers or women in the Thirties or elegant old ladies in button boots and obscure sheepish faces you could cradle in your hand. The face is the *bill* and the feet are the *illy* and *itty* bits. Now there are seventeen possibilities bumbling about on the cliff beneath my window. *Piss* is jetting out of their backsides. Some are chocking out shit like *Chiclets* from a machine. Seven possibilities leave the scene. Now there are ten, rambling around vacuuming up whatever feed remains. One smaller sligher possibility keeps headbutting the larger possibility beside it, maybe its mother who knows. Then it runs off and head butts at random. *Oh is there food left in the trough?* Head butt! *Found something in the grass?* Head butt!! *Let me sidle up here beside you and give you a good* head butt!!! Hah! The little headbutter trots from pillar to post, caught in the loop of endless possibility, kind of wagging the woolly tail-flap over its damp butt.

THE PRESENT

I was leaving Monday so I gave him a present Friday. I couldn't be sure I would see him again. He was taken aback and leapt into his car. He thought perhaps I was giving him a present early so he would have time to get me a present, which was not at all my intention. But he gave me a present Saturday so of course I had to go get him another present back. Then he, as a point of honour, had to rush to get me another present. This didn't seem fair. He had a wife and son as well as a full-time job and I really just wanted to thank him. So I got him another present but I didn't give it to him. I kept it all Saturday and all Sunday and slept with it Sunday night. My plan was to keep it close by until the last possible moment, then to give it to him, when he would have no chance of getting me a present back. There was a price to pay. Taxes. Like the look of anticipation no matter how miniscule on his face and then the vaguest hint of a cloud passing over it. Also the slightly tinted aroma rising from his eyes. Also—anxiety. However, as a result of these maneuvers and countless others too refined and nuanced to relate, I sailed my present through the noose of the weekend. And so it was early on Monday I found myself on board ship, on the deck overlooking the quay, one clenched hand on the rail, the last present under my arm, scanning faces in the crowd with mounting panic, preparing to hurl the thing, as I feel the ship lurch, the horn blast, the soles of my feet turn into suction cups as we begin to move out

WATER

Near the piazza at the end of the street there is a drinking fountain and in the fountain there is water for which you need to walk through the streets (a very long time) to the piazza at the end of the street. If you could go through the streets, if you have limbs sturdy enough to make your way through the crowded streets, and the heat, though they weigh like iron, you could get this fountain water, you could get this cool water, you could be refreshed if you had the energy to go and the energy to bend your head and drink. The energy you drink is called water. The energy to get the water is called *walking*, or *forward march*. The feeling when you walk through crowds toward the end of the street goes on a very long time. People are eating in all the restaurants and you can't quite believe that there will be a fountain where you stop a hole with your finger and water spurts out. What do you care about the little tables and the loaded platters of food or the dour tight faces of the tourists or even the smooth attentive ones? There is silence in all the houses and you can't quite believe the Walgreens will be lit by round bushes of light and that there will be people compact as skittles in there and that you have the energy to walk through snow, and boots, and the energy of money to pay for soup that would give you energy to walk through the snow the next time to the Walgreens at the end of the street. It takes a very long time to walk through the crowd. You walk in the middle of the street into a raw caesura torn between the people on the right and the people on the left, not counting the very large guys at right angles outside the restaurants calling people in. You can no longer call a crowd a *crowd*. It is a *matrix*. A *gel*. You are just another sticky particle. No-one hears you as you walk that very long short way. No-one hears you as you stand at the window to look outside feeling the heat's declaration of intent, no longer remembering the nights of looking silently for a long time at the bead of light that is a plane traveling across the sky or the pleasant mornings in the bus-shelter on North Main Street watching the world lurch by.

TORONTO TO BOSTON

I was told to pick him up at the gate and when I got there, right enough, he was waiting for me. A small man, still and alert, in dark clothes, a dark overcoat over his arm.

He was made of language, with white paper collar and cuffs.

Toronto is a good city for poetry and the take-off from Toronto Airport to Boston is spectacular. He, of course, had no idea what was in store.

I introduced myself to him. He was polite. And gave his name. We waited. I didn't see the point in explaining anything. Something very special had been arranged.

Then off on swing. The plane was small and we seemed to shoot straight up. We flew just above the clouds, hugging Lake Ontario. I was in the window-seat, just behind the wing. I could see the dinghy of the engine jutting forward, a donut, almost sphincter-like. Below us puffy forests of white clouds. Further down shoals of sparse dabs out for a Sunday stroll. Further down again the edge of the lake. Little white houses like oblong pieces of chalk. A scattering of nits. Blue-grey which could be water or sky. Above the horizon a grey-brown band of cloud. Small rounded separate bright woolly hilltops as if we could visit our relatives there, taste real food on a raw wood table, in a very real place. And all above a vaster hemisphere, expansive, with its own calm organisations of cloud, remote and self-contained. It was like there was a heaven and then a heaven on top of heaven, the two heavens girded all around by the horizon. Empyrean.

We both leaned forward. I felt the charge of his attention and saw him, from the corner of my eye, raise his right hand fingers splayed to his face and hold it slightly slanted before him so that he looked through the fingers through the window to everything above and below, the

expanse to which only the feeding in of the lake edge and the sun behind us lent direction. It was as if his gaze, even so governed, governed and stitched the levels and layers together. I felt cupped between wing and wing, if not in shadow then in a valley, darkened by the blaze of his concentration. He was sitting beside me but seemed hurled above me, his eyes the apex from which the visible depended. I could not see what he saw but the realisation surged through me: *Now he looks down on what he has looked up to*. His hand shook. With great precision his left hand reclaimed it. Set it down like a body on the tray table in front of him. The cabin became a cabin again.

It was still light for our descent. I looked sideways through the window. I could see asphalt snaking rivers, pooling asphalt lakes, crossed by roads that looked like bicycle tracks. Needlepoint housing estates or cemeteries. Lakes into which the edges of the land reached like how ice retreats when you pour warm water on it. And vaguer lakes, more alive in their vaguer outlines: dragons, foxes, an opening hand. Fields brushed with charcoal, as if he had drawn them and rubbed them down with his palm. He didn't stir. I could smell the smell of pastilles, and eucalyptus. His eyes were open but he looked straight ahead.

As we taxied to the gate, I kept my eyes on the window. I could see my own reflection. I knew when I looked around, he would be gone.

THINKING OF YOU

I went to the pound store and I fainted in there. I went to the church and I fainted. I ran like a rat round the back tracks and shacks of the Regional Hospital and I kept falling back like a plank thinking of you and passing out flat. When I saw you in the very small house that just about fit but didn't suit you my hand shot out to cradle your head and I said *Look he looks fine. Look he looks as if. Sleeping.* I went to your real house and I passed out. My giant right leg bent at the knee and I took a baby step past the hole in the floor through the door into your house and I passed out. When I bobbed up—one airy shoulder wedged against one wall of the hall, the other airy shoulder against the other—I swam arm over arm through the air to the bottom stair where I clung heaving dust from my lungs till I passed out. When I came to it was dark. I hobbled on my knees up the stairs—eyeballs sloshing in my head—none of my joints working any more—I got to the top and did a belly flop smack on the landing, then I passed out. I passed out in your room and on the threshold of your room and before the threshold and within. *The stub of my toe touched the threshold. The hoof of my foot arched the wood.* I got to the bed and I passed out. Under the window I stood head bowed and I passed out. I lapped about the foot of the ladder to the attic and *you know where.* I fainted all over that room. The cigarette stubbed in the ash tray seemed like a quiet chair but I couldn't gather myself enough to sit in that quiet room up to my ankles in ash-drift so I went one way, then the other at the same time. How could I know which way to turn? So I passed out. That time I passed out for a very long time and I didn't get up until the light in the room turned green and the light in my head turned red.

THE WINDOW

You can't close the window and keep it open at the same time. *Why not?* You just can't. *That doesn't make sense.* Well, opening and closing are mutually exclusive: You can't have open without not closed, you can't have closed without not open. *They sound pretty closely related to me.* Well they're like two sides of—let's not go into that. The existence of one depends on the non-existence of the other. *There must be a better way for them to live.* There's no them—*You just said*—It's just a single window. *Still.* Still what? You can't have the window open and closed at the same time and that's all there is to it. *Really? It would make so much sense to have them open and closed. You could have a breeze on your face and no mosquitos would get in.* You can use screens. That's a way for a window to be open and closed at the same time. *I don't mean screens.* What's wrong with screens? *They dice up the air into tiny cubes. It's like Lego for dust mites. There must be another way to solve this problem.* There is. Look, a closed window is most like a wall, except for transparency. And an open window is like a closed window, except for the aperture. So, let a closed window be x . And let an open window be y . Let a wall be w . Let transparency be t . And let an aperture be a . Let a closed window equal a wall plus transparency. So $x=w+t$. And let an open window equal a closed window plus aperture, $y=x+a$. So you have $x=w+t$ and $y=x+a$ or $y=w+t+a$. So $x=w+t$ and $y=w+t+a$. Now take the wall away, take the transparency away, and you're left with $x=y+a$. Assign a a value of zero because what is it anyway but empty air and *presto* $y=x+0$ which is to say $y=x$ unless that value changes. In all other respects you have proved that $y=x$ and, given a value of zero to a , a closed window and an open window are identical. What do you think? *I don't know. I don't like the way you put y before x there. It doesn't sound right. Also it's not exact. You only said most.*

SECRECTIONS

So, men produce a couple of major secretions. Piss and poop. *Not exactly secretions are they.* Well, they're important extrusions. So, piss, we have a sample of it here, can be quite beautiful: golden, yellow, pale, watery, silvery. Can be quite, redolent sometimes. It can be quite, like tulipy. In any case okay, that's piss. So, and poop of course is very, well, the color's not necessarily very attractive. And it often has an odor that's not that palatable. But you're not going to eat it. It *is* quite sculptural though. It's more of a 3-dimensional, performative substance. Pretty to look at not necessarily, color not necessarily so good. Okay. *So is that it?* No, well men also produce sweat and sweat is, not highly visible. It hasn't got a great deal of visuality or dimensionality. It has a kind of a sheen. And sheen is important. *OK. Anything else?* Well. Semen. *Seamen. What's that?* Well I happen to have a sample here. *Where is it? I can't see anything.* Well you need a dark background sometimes to see it. Or a teaspoon. *Right. Is that it?* Well that's about it Vomit? *What about women?* Well women produce piss and poop as well more or less the same as men. Except not always, no probably with the same velocity and volume maybe, but not always with the same directional precision sometimes we've noticed. But in terms of visual characteristics like the color of the pee, the color of the poop, not much difference there I don't think. *Is that it?* Well—sweat as well you know, more or less the same, more of a gleam or a glaze than an actual volumetric substance probably. Not much color there. More of a transparent effect. But gloss is important as we know. *Is THAT it?* Well—no. *Are you going to say vomit?* No. Well. There is actually something else. *WHAT'S THAT.* Blood. *Blood? You mean the red stuff?* Yeah. *You mean the crimson stuff?* Yeah. *You mean the Stuff-Of-Life-Stuff?* Yeah. *WOMEN PRODUCE BLOOD?* Yeah. Well it's not exactly totally blood, it has other properties too. But yeah, more or less women produce blood. *WOW. Like once?* Actually on a monthly basis. *WHOA—THAT'S AMAZING. So if you ever run out of like dye or paint or ink or something*

... . So anything else? I'm almost afraid to ask. Anything else? Well,
yah. Okay. Women produce—human beings. Whatja mean? Like,
that's like saying x=x. No. Women produce human beings that are
smaller. Small enough to produce. LIKE THROUGH THEIR PORES? Well
no. Through a very elastic and accommodating organ called “the
vagina.” So lemme get this straight. You're saying that women produce
not just piss and poop and have the same kind of watery sort of mucousy
poopy excretions that men do but they, they produce BLOOD AND NOT
ONLY BLOOD THEY PRODUCE THE WHOLE REST OF THE HUMAN BEING
TOO THEY PRODUCE HUMAN BEINGS (in miniature yes)
WHOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA WOMEN PRODUCE
HUMAN BEINGS WHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AA

PEOPLE ASK IF I EVER GET LONELY

People ask if I ever get lonely. No. A house is good company. Heat has its own intelligence. A bowl of oatmeal in the belly gives comfort from the inside out. The *harrumph* of the knife. I talk to myself. At the moment the raindrops are chomping on the skein of plane and chopper and variegated motor sound that passes for silence in Alaska. Also you know that *clicky-clack* sound the toaster oven makes when you set it to five minute toast? It's mechanical. Even if you pull the plug it unwinds till it's done. The birds. The three-note call of the golden-crowned sparrow, like a reminder that something else is here, even if it's you. But don't be ridiculous. Of course people don't ask if I get lonely! Who put that title there?

THE HOUSE AND THE PARISH HALL

The house and the parish hall don't look like much when you see them first, the hall as you come into town, stuck as if on a shelf, just slightly above the road. The house further down but by the time you get to it, the bay has taken all the *ooohs* and *aahs*, though by no means the most magnificent around here. I suppose you could say *sublime*, it has that skimpiness. There's a shop, a pub of course, that's where you have your creamy pint but happily the church is out of view or if not then at least it's chubby and white with its snaggletooth gravestones tucked out of sight at the back where they lean over chuckling primroses, and daisies wagging their pink-tipped shaggy heads. And the house, I'm coming to that, you can see its yellow or red door from here. It's not fully dreamed yet. But you can smell that salt air and if you notice, there are no claw marks on the bark of the trees, no track marks of the bear, and in the deep shade of the undergrowth you will not find the mud-baths of the boar. That's what I'm liking so far: How you get the black pint's creamy head, the batch loaf's fragrant crust, but there are no earthquakes or snakes.

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